

# **Land Use and Transportation**

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Over the past century, growth of automobile use, highways, and auto-related land development have enabled people to increase the distance between home and job and to travel across long distances quickly. For better or worse, low-density suburban development has become the dominant land use pattern in metropolitan areas today. This pattern of dispersed centers of activity has contributed to an environment where only one type of transportation — the personal automobile — is viable.

This type of transportation system can place an undue burden on roadways and contribute to traffic congestion. Past efforts to address congestion focused primarily upon adding new capacity — more and wider roads. Today, some planners and policy makers believe that mobility solutions may lie in a closer examination of the link between land use and transportation and in using policies to strengthen that link.

## **CURRENT AND PAST EFFORTS**

Several recent efforts have made steps to improve the connection between transportation and land use:

### **Washington Growth Management Act (1990)**

The Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management Act (GMA) to address some of the negative aspects of population growth in the state — urban sprawl, loss of open space, traffic congestion, pollution, diminishing wildlife habitat. GMA requires comprehensive planning at the county level, and it recognizes the link between transportation and land use. The ‘concurrency’ element of GMA requires that local jurisdictions have adequate transportation facilities or strategies in place prior to approving major new development.

### **Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs)**

Authorized under the 1990 Growth Management Act, RTPOs provide a formal mechanism for cities, counties, and the state to coordinate transportation planning at the regional level. RTPOs develop multimodal regional transportation plans and project lists for funding. The process is intended to establish a regional approach to transportation planning, capital investments, and service improvements.

### **Federal Transportation Legislation (1991, 1998)**

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) represented a significant shift in federal transportation funding. Instead of emphasizing interstate highway construction, ISTEA shifted the focus to include system preservation and maintenance, as well as efficiencies to improve the movement of people and goods. Other modes, including transit, bicycles, and pedestrian infrastructure, received increased attention and funding. The 1998 reauthorization, the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) established a new program that allows jurisdictions to limit sprawl through interrelated transportation, land use, and environmental protection programs.

## **PROPOSED SOLUTIONS**

### **Strengthen Powers of Regional Agencies**

Creation of regional authorities can enable coordination of programs across several levels of government and among competing jurisdictions. Washington's RTPOs are an example of regional government on a small scale. In areas such as Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, B.C., regional authorities have control over transportation infrastructure and funding, as well as provisions to enforce land use plans. Integrating land use and transportation plans at all levels of government could help improve use of the existing transportation system and prevent future land use and transportation conflicts.

### **Promote 'Smart Growth'**

An emerging trend in planning and urban design focuses on changing the conventional wisdom of what new development should look like. This 'new' type of development harkens back to a pattern more common in urban and suburban areas prior to World War II and features a grid pattern of streets, smaller building lots, mixed-use development, sidewalks, pedestrian-scale lighting, and other amenities. Destinations such as the corner store, coffee shops, and restaurants are within walking distance of residences and work places, establishing the presence of people on the streets and enhancing the perception of safety and vitality. In 'smart growth' communities, the number of car trips per household can be significantly less than that of traditional suburban households.

Policy changes to promote smart growth may include:

- zoning revisions to allow mixed-use development
- zoning for increases in density
- modifications to building setback requirements
- transfer of development rights to increase density in some areas while protecting open space elsewhere
- modification of parking requirements
- expedited permitting to encourage projects that meet specified criteria.

Challenges to 'smart growth' include NIMBY ("not in my backyard") opposition; a lack of recent experience on the part of developers and lenders with this kind of development; and a more limited number of households who want to live in higher density communities.